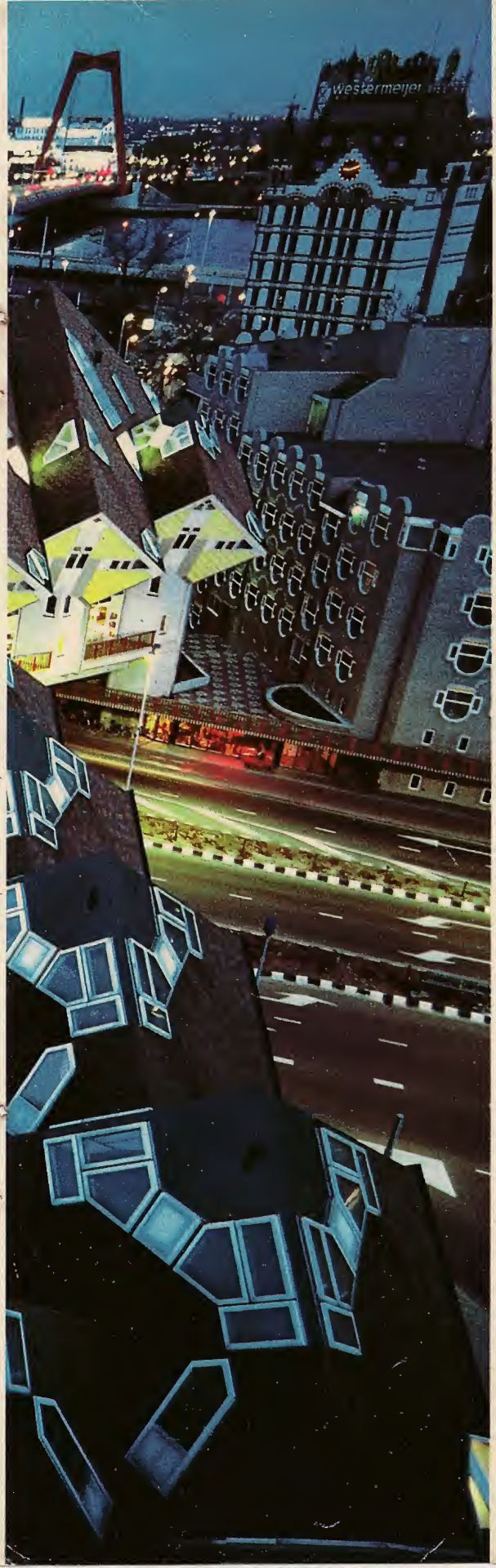

The Dutch Touch

In their heyday as seagoing traders and architects of a worldwide empire, the Dutch came home to a land where the books were balanced, the streets scrubbed, the dikes quickly repaired. Today's Dutch are as tidy as ever, but they inhabit one of the world's most crowded countries, brimming with hundreds of thousands who flooded in after the empire ran aground. Undaunted, the stubborn, fair-minded people of the Netherlands plug away at problems with characteristic ingenuity. Even a no-nonsense city like Rotterdam (left), leveled by German bombs during World War II and now the world's busiest port, finds an avant-garde solution to the housing shortage with a street-spanning apartment complex.

By BART McDOWELL
SENIOR ASSISTANT EDITOR

Photographs by NATHAN BENN and FARRELL GREHAN

NATHAN BENN

Headlines called it "Murder on the Milk Train," and broadcasters gave hourly reports: Hijackers had seized a train with 24 hostages in—of all places—that orderly kingdom, the Netherlands.

The terrorists were residents of the Netherlands but not Dutch. *South Moluccans?* Newsmen thumbed their atlases to find the Moluccan islands, part of Indonesia. Why had South Moluccans come around the world to live in the Netherlands, and what were their grievances? Before the 12-day siege ended, news bulletins had spread more questions than answers. The Netherlands, it seemed, was a land of ethnic minorities.

"That was the moment in 1975 when everyone realized we had major problems," says Jan Harbers, an Amsterdam official who now works with residents from every inhabited continent.

Historically, the Netherlands has always been a haven for refugees: Jews fleeing the Iberian Inquisitions, Huguenots forced out of France, even the English Pilgrims before they sailed on the *Mayflower*. But all those famous refugees came before the Dutch lost a worldwide empire, full employment, and their complacency.

Today this 41,160-square-kilometer kingdom (15,892 square miles, half the size of Maine) is home to 14.5 million residents—making it one of the most densely populated nations in the world. At least 540,000 are "outlanders," as the government tactfully calls them ("foreigners" seems inhospitable, other terms pejorative). That number doesn't include the slim, sloe-eyed people of Indonesian ancestry who have Netherlands nationality and speak Dutch "with a sweet, singing tone," as some say. "We consider them fully Dutch," one man told me.

Surinamers—some of African stock, others from the subcontinent of India and the East Indies—may also carry Dutch passports; about half as many live in the Netherlands, roughly 180,000, as in independent Suriname. "They are here because we were there," says a clergyman.

People once known as guest workers (and now often the guest unemployed) may come from Turkey (156,000), Morocco (112,000), southern Europe, even West Germany or Britain.

South Moluccans remain the hardest core. They have resisted any form of assimilation since the first 900 arrived on the ship *Kota Inten* 35 years ago. These Protestant Christians were warriors loyal to the Netherlands in the colonial struggle against Muslim Indonesia after World War II. They say that the Dutch led them to believe they would help them win the independence of their homelands. Bitterly, some have insisted on living "temporarily" in the barracks of old concentration camps while nursing their dreams of returning home. They have competing governments-in-exile. Moluccans now number 40,000, and the younger people seem as obdurate as their parents.

Though France has its Arabs, Germany its Turks, and Britain its Indians, no other European country has anything like the Netherlands' variety of new residents living in such proximity and concentration. Perhaps 10 percent of the Dutch population now comes from exotic stock. Not impressive by U. S. standards—but a new demographic experience in modern Europe.

This unmelted pot now bubbles with a national unemployment rate that hovers around 13 percent—though among some minorities the rate is far higher. Generous health insurance and other benefits cushion the hardship. A quarter of the population of Amsterdam is on welfare or social security.

Since their government stoutly opposes ghettos, old Dutch families in working-class neighborhoods smell strange foods cooking and hear the high-decibel sounds of alien music, the voices of children who noisily stay up well past the traditional Dutch bedtime. Native-born Dutchmen compete for jobs with the outlanders and pay high taxes for services that the strangers receive. No wonder they are reexamining policies of

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Exotic faces *line the streets of The Hague, the Dutch seat of government, as Moluccans mark the 36th anniversary of an "independent" Republic of South Molucca. Angry that they received no help in regaining their homeland following the Dutch loss of Indonesia in 1949, South Moluccans resist assimilation in the Netherlands. Bitterness has erupted into violence several times.*

An estimated 10 percent of the Dutch population is of foreign extraction. Traditionally tolerant, the Dutch levy fines against anyone caught making racist jokes in public.

their welfare state and even their historic traditions of tolerance. Visitors may well ask, "Who are the Dutch today?"

Once the answer was easy. I can remember when Dutch friends defined themselves proudly as "traders and preachers." They counted their blessings and their cash, and they boasted, "Our language has at least eight words for 'cleanliness.'" Admirable. And how many synonyms for "dull"?

But the Dutch were never dull. These were the folk who produced Rembrandt, Mata Hari, and Limburg cheeses. On the surface, of course, they seem phlegmatic, cautious, stubborn, and blunt—how else should a Dutch uncle speak?

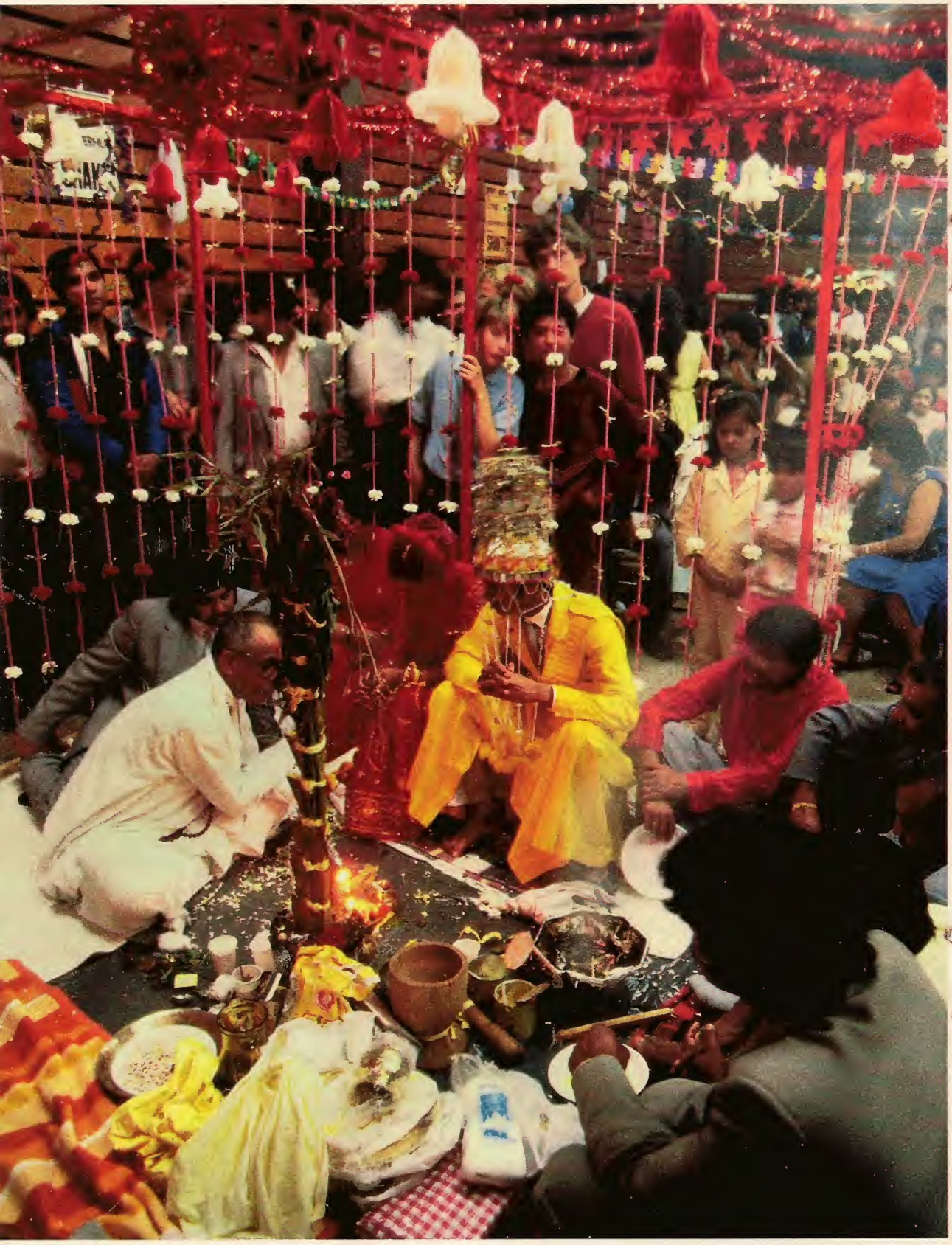
Matter-of-factly, Dutch engineers still take on daunting jobs: expanding the world's busiest port, Rotterdam . . . completing the world's most complex public works scheme, the Delta Project (page 526).

Struggle has made the Dutch what they are. Rome's historian Tacitus wrote of the people living in the Rhine Delta, "They form a Germanic group that is extremely civilized but with rude manners." Pliny the Elder took note of man-made hillocks where people lived just above the ocean tides in the first century A.D.—"like sailors on a ship, when the surrounding land is flooded."

The first real polders—reclaimed lands—date from about 1100, and drainage windmills began pumping in the early 1400s. As one observer marveled, "God created the world, but the Dutch made Holland." Canals scored the soggy soil. Squat barges and tall sailing ships brought prosperity to growing ports.

The Dutch repelled invaders, harassed occupiers, and grabbed imperial prizes. Once their empire embraced 80 million people. But the Dutch also learned to avoid foreign quarrels. Grudges were not Christian—and were also bad for business. Neutral in World War I, the Netherlands later became the home of the World Court.

World War II and Hitler's five-year occupation tested Dutch mettle. Alone among Europeans, Amsterdammers went on a general strike to protest the persecution of Jews.



FARRELL GREHAN

After their own liberation the Dutch lost their empire but won world trading markets. Great companies—both Dutch and multinationals like Royal Dutch/Shell and N.V. Philips—hired battalions of workers. So former colonials came home along with loyalists from Asia and the New World and hastily recruited laborers from lands around the Mediterranean. Of course, the newcomers stayed on.

For all the new Dutch diversity, many people still follow traditional pursuits: They make cheese, balance accounts, tend tulips, paint canvases, fish for herring, and wear wooden shoes in muddy gardens. Their standard of living remains among the highest in the world.

Behind their ramparts—1,200 miles of dikes, dams, and dunes—the Dutch still struggle against an old and intimate enemy, the sea. Recently, though, they talk of a truce. "We have taken our last land from the ocean," a conservationist assured me. Times change.

But traveling around the Netherlands, one wonders. For all the oceanic flatness of the land, for all its geometric farms with Mondrian angles, the country conserves a vast variety.

Each city has its stubbornly protected flavor. Rotterdam, rebuilt from war rubble, is all work and no play. "Shirts in Rotterdam," says the old saw, "are sold with sleeves already rolled up." The city dies at night.

Spires and towers of Leiden, Delft, and Utrecht are as old as history, the streets as spirited as the students who animate their cafés.

The Hague stands on ceremony. Bureaucrats wear white shirts and dark suits, for The Hague is the seat of government. But not the capital: That titular distinction belongs to Amsterdam, and only the Dutch can understand the difference.

Curtain of flowers *and drinking straws separates a red-veiled Surinamese Hindu bride and yellow-garbed groom from guests at a ceremony near Amsterdam. Some 170,000 Surinamers in the Netherlands accepted the offer of continued Dutch citizenship following their nation's independence in 1975.*

Flat appears vertical *in this aerial view of sub-sea-level farmland near Naarden in the central Netherlands, where Dutch farmers trim their fields*

FARRELL GREHAN

with drainage canals. Nearly half of the Netherlands consists of polders—reclaimed land—and one-quarter of the nation lies below sea level.

Everyone, though, sees the difference between the cities themselves. The Hague is neat and stuffy; Amsterdam is untidy and self-indulgent—with much to indulge: museums, concerts, theaters, piety, and sin. The oldest church in town abuts the red-light district. Antique houses slouch, and the city rings with secular bells: bicycles, streetcars, striking clocks. Restaurants offer menus for pet dogs, and dogs offer hazards for strolling the streets.

Northeast, but still within commuter range, lie lands newly seized from the sea and the raw, planned city of Lelystad. ("It hasn't a single disco," an Amsterdammer mourns. "But it does have toilets for dogs.") Its residents are recent transplants, and wives of commuters are called "green widows."

The village of Volendam, surrounded by Protestants, is a Catholic island in the north. Tiny, immaculate houses face the street with windows polished like gemstones; on each sill sits a small still life of fancy china and pampered plants. ("It is not true that we wash our windows every day," says Hilda Reurs firmly. "Only once a week!") And in their own special dialect Volendam fisherfolk tell how to take the smell of herring off one's hands: First apply vinegar, then wash. People wash a lot in Volendam.

Along the North Sea stretches Friesland, guarding its language with road signs in both Dutch and Frisian. The horizon is lanced by windmills, onion-dome church steeples, and trees tilted by prevailing winds. Offshore, these winds and ocean currents create "walking islands," as local folk call the unstable sandbars that gain and lose their sand. Beyond them lie the North Sea gas rigs, a hefty source of Dutch revenues before the price of natural gas tumbled.

People in Friesland have short first names ("they say there used to be a tax for registering long names"), but in the Catholic south, names expand to honor relatives and saints. In Limburg everything seems more expansive. Hilly, wooded, this was coal-mining country, often invaded during its long history. The antique capital, Maastricht, takes its name from the River Maas, or Meuse, which Romans forded there in A.D. 43.

Limburg's governor, Dr. Sjeng Kremers, a former professor of psychology, characterizes his people as "really southern. We like to laugh and eat. We're optimistic. And we celebrate everything—if we are sick, we say, 'I celebrate because I'm ill.' We had a trinity here: the provincial government, the old coal mines, and the church. We like to work—and never have strikes. Minority groups here have caused no trouble."

East of Arnhem on the German border, farmers plow black earth, whitened in spring by foraging sea gulls. Pig raisers may think in terms of exporting whole farms—livestock, machinery, and even, temporarily, staff—to developing countries. "But at home they are conservative," notes a village physician. "On the German side of the frontier, villagers keep their curtains drawn at night. Not the Dutch. We have nothing to hide—or else we want to see outside."

A varied people, innovative, traditional.

"What charm is for Italians, and allure for the French, tolerance is for the Dutch." So says art historian Luca Dosi Delfini, a resident of the Netherlands for 20 years, an Italian by birth and a former resident of France. "The Dutch," he adds, "are the most civilized people I know."

"Our tolerance is largely a myth," insists Amsterdam clergyman Dr. H. G. Boswijk. "When Surinamers come to our churches, people observe a friendly distance. They say, 'You are welcome, but leave us alone.' It's a kind of implicit apartheid."

And yet Dr. Boswijk reports a recent incident in his own Protestant church. "A lesbian couple had a child by means of a donor, and they wanted to baptize the baby. The congregation discussed the matter at length—and decided we should baptize the baby. It was a very happy day."

"That could not have happened ten years ago," says one feminist leader, herself a lesbian. "But we get along with each other in the Netherlands because we are a small country. We need each other."

In the Catholic south—"below the rivers," as they call it—Protestants were often isolated. Film producer Ton Vriens, who grew up in the south, recalls such isolation even in Amsterdam years later: "We had a Catholic baker and butcher—and Protestants wouldn't shop there. Many Dutchmen knew what it was to be different."

And perhaps that was the very reason so many Dutch risked their lives during the Nazi occupation to save Jewish neighbors. Consider Judith Belinfante, director of the Amsterdam Jewish Historical Museum. She was born to a Jewish couple in hiding in The Hague during the occupation. Her parents' former maid, a girl not yet 21, announced that she herself was the mother, registered the birth as illegitimate, and secured a ration of milk for the baby, risking her own life.

Tolerance seems too weak a word.

A longtime admirer of the Dutch is the former Spanish ambassador to The Hague, the Duke of Baena. His book *The Dutch Puzzle* is widely quoted and, like everything else in the kingdom, debated.

The duke calls the Dutch "grand and petty. . . . materialistic and realistic—and above all, extremely religious. . . . Their exterior is . . . slow in movement, the rhythm of bicycles and barges. . . . yet in no part of the world have I known a more nervous people. . . ."

A Dutch housewife complained to me about Moluccan child rearing: "They have loose hands." Meaning Moluccans slap their youngsters. It was the same complaint that 17th-century citizens of Leiden leveled against the refugee English Pilgrims—too harsh with their children.

"In 20 years I have never seen a child physically punished," notes Dosi Delfini. "Heroes are not welcome," he continues, "and neither is rhetoric nor extravagance.

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Floral artistry *in The Hague portrays Beatrix, Queen of the Netherlands, at right, and 77-year-old Princess Juliana, who abdicated in favor of her daughter in 1980. Ruled by matriarchs since 1890, the Dutch invest their monarch with few political powers beyond selecting the person who forms a government after each national election.*

When my friend from Germany brings her fancy car to Amsterdam, she often gets a broken window."

Last winter, when canals froze solid, the Dutch held their traditional 11-city ice-skating race. Some 17,000 citizens signed up to skate, among them a last-minute entry listed as "Mr. van Buren," actually 18-year-old Willem-Alexander, Prince of Orange and heir to the throne.

The prince completed the 200-kilometer tour in 14¼ hours, and a delighted Queen Beatrix greeted him at the finish line. The prince was roundly cheered for spunk and endurance. But heroism has a price.

"The palace shouldn't have let him sign up ahead of others who were turned away," some people grumbled. "It was unfair."

Rotterdam businessman S.J.R. de Monchy recalls that when his wife inherited some old family jewelry, she wanted some diamonds reset. "But the jeweler refused to do it. 'These stones were set over charcoal,' he said, 'so they would glitter less.' It was bad taste to show off."

A Calvinist society with stubbornly maintained traditions. Now enter the exotics, bearing problems. Drugs, for instance.

Royal paperwork *occupies Queen Beatrix* ***(right)*** *daily in her office in The Hague. She is of the House of Orange-Nassau, the ruling dynasty since 1814.*

Restored to its 17th-century grandeur, the royal country estate of Het Loo Palace ***(below)****, near Apeldoorn, was donated to the state in 1971 for use as a museum.*

BOTH BY NATHAN BENN

Window-shopping *takes on a new meaning in the Wallen, Amsterdam's infamous red-light district. Here in the heart of the capital, prostitutes beckon from brothel windows (**right**), and Salvation Army volunteers (**below,** in a double exposure) cheerfully distribute literature. Loosely regulated by authorities, many of the port city's several thousand prostitutes pay taxes, get regular checkups, and participate in government-sponsored health and insurance plans. They also take traveler's checks.*

Drugs are met more frequently by Dutch tolerance than by law enforcement.

As a crossroads city with far-flung trade, Amsterdam has had its share of hard drugs, and crime increased with narcotics. But things have changed since Amsterdam's happy hippie days in the 1960s. Mayor Ed van Thijn's cleanup campaign has brought such a decrease in crime rates that Amsterdam is now a strong contender for host of the 1992 Summer Olympics. Yet there is still work to do.

"Hard drugs have ruined the brothel business," complains Frits van de Wereld, a kingpin of local prostitution and the hashish market. Frits owns seven brothels, by his own count. ("Actually, he owns 11, but won't admit it for tax purposes," insists crime reporter Hans Hofman.)

"I been here 59 years—and no protection paid," Frits says firmly. "No Mafia here. Too small. The girls here? Not Dutch girls—70 percent international." But street prostitutes—tolerated if not legally accepted—have undercut prices in brothels. "Hard drugs is *finish*."

The former chief of the Amsterdam narcotics squad, Barry Thomas de Koningh, estimates that of 400 street prostitutes, 300 are addicts. "Our old opium law lists illegal drugs, but the public prosecutor gives guidelines to the police. Marijuana is technically a misdemeanor, but it is not enforced."

True. At the Bulldog café on Leidseplein, customers can openly buy marijuana in a variety of blends and flavors. Dozens of coffeehouses around town display signs showing the seven-fingered leaf of the marijuana plant. They serve hash-laced "space cakes" with butter and syrup.

"We're not interested in these people,"